

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 145 071

UD 017 451

TITLE School Desegregation in Raleigh County, West Virginia.

INSTITUTION Commission on Civil Rights, Washington, D.C.

PUB DATE Aug 77

NOTE 27p.; For related documents see UD 017 402-418 and UD 017 447-452

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$2.06 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Integration Effects; *Integration Methods; *Integration Plans; *Integration Readiness; *Integration Studies; Race Relations; *School Integration

IDENTIFIERS *West Virginia (Raleigh County)

ABSTRACT

The Raleigh County public school system, through several phases implemented over a period of more than 12 years, has effectively desegregated its student bodies in all schools. The leadership on the part of each of the superintendents involved was the key to making the changes peaceful. Other school personnel and the board of education provided support to the superintendent. Provisions to assure a desegregated faculty are lacking. The number of black faculty has decreased significantly during the years desegregation has taken place. The addition of white faculty during the same time indicates that there has been an opportunity to recruit black teachers, but that opportunity has been missed so far by the school system. Moreover, there has been no serious attempt to provide teachers with training specifically designed to assist them in dealing with a desegregated student body. While the Raleigh public schools have desegregated their student bodies, they have so far failed to pay sufficient attention to the highly important area of faculty and faculty/impact upon students. (Author/AM)

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SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN RALEIGH COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

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August 1977

SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN RALEIGH COUNTY,
WEST VIRGINIA

--A report prepared by the West Virginia Advisory Committee
to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

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to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
August 1977

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Sirs and Madam:

The West Virginia Advisory Committee submits this report of its study of the desegregation of schools in Raleigh County, West Virginia.

The Advisory Committee began the study in the spring of 1976 as a part of the Commission's national study on school desegregation.

The major finding of the Advisory Committee was that the community gave support to the efforts to desegregate schools in 1973 because it wished to obey the law and because it received strong leadership from the school administration. The Committee also found that the school district needs to take affirmative action in hiring more minority faculty and staff members and to ensure the representation of members of minority groups in administrative positions.

The Advisory Committee hopes that the Raleigh County Public School District case study will be helpful to other communities in their efforts to achieve meaningful school desegregation.

Respectfully,

/s/
JAMES B. MCINTYRE
Chairperson

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Members of the West Virginia Advisory Committee wish to thank the Raleigh County School District for its help in all stages of data collection for this Raleigh County desegregation study.

Preparation of this report was the principal staff assignment of Armando Rodriguez and Victoria Squier, with assistance from Edward Darden and Wanda Hoffman and staff support from Ruth Peets and Joann Harris. The project was under the overall supervision of Jacob Schlitt, Director, Mid-Atlantic Regional Office.

Appreciation is also extended to Jessalyn Bullock, Rodney Cash, Frank Knorr, Michele Macon, and Evelyn Chandler of the Commission staff for assisting in the final production of the report. Preparation for publication was the responsibility of Rita Higgins, Audrey Holton and Vivian Washington, supervised by Bobby Wortman, in the Commission's Publication Support Center, Office of Management.

At the appointment of the Staff Director of the Commission, all activities that contributed to this report were under the general supervision and coordination of William T. White, Jr., Assistant Staff Director, Office of National Civil Rights Issues.

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PREFACE

The United States Commission on Civil Rights released on August 24, 1976, its report to the Nation: Fulfilling the Letter and Spirit of the Law: Desegregation of the Nation's Public Schools.

The report's findings and recommendations were based upon information gathered during a 10-month school desegregation project. This included four formal hearings (Boston, Massachusetts; Denver, Colorado; Louisville, Kentucky; and Tampa, Florida); four open meetings held by State Advisory Committees (Berkeley, California; Corpus Christi, Texas; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Stamford, Connecticut); a survey of nearly 1,300 local school districts; and 29 case studies of communities which had difficulties with desegregation, had moderate success with desegregation, or had substantial success with desegregation.

Subsequent to the report's release, considerable interest was generated concerning the specifics of the case study findings, which, owing to space limitations in the national report, were limited to a few brief paragraphs. In an effort to comply with public requests for more detailed information, Commission staff have prepared monographs for each of the case studies. These monographs were written from the extensive field notes already collected and supplemented, if needed, with further interviews in each community. They reflect, in detail, the original case study purpose of finding which local policies, practices, and programs in each community surveyed contributed to peaceful desegregation and which ones did not.

It is hoped that the following monograph will serve to further an understanding of the school desegregation process in this Nation.

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I. BACKGROUND

Raleigh County, West Virginia, named after the English adventurer and soldier, Sir Walter Raleigh, was established in 1850. It is 605 square miles in area and is largely rural. At the time of the 1970 census, about 50,000 (72 percent) of the county's 70,080 residents were living in rural areas. Of its total population, 90 percent are white and 10 percent are black.

The leading industry is coal mining, which employs 23.9 percent of the residents. Manufacturing employs 7.2 percent of the total work force and the construction industry another 5.9 percent. Of the total work force of almost 20,000, blacks comprise 1,270 or about 6 percent.

During the 1975-76 school year, Raleigh County had 54 schools enrolling 17,338 students. Included in this figure are the Piney Oaks Kindergarten Center, the Raleigh County Vocational/Technical Center, 9 high schools, 7 junior high schools, and 36 elementary schools. The racial and ethnic distributions of the county's schools, students, and teaching staff appear in tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1
Raleigh County Schools, 1953-71

Year	White Schools				Black Schools			
	High School	Junior High School	Elementary	1-Room	High School	Junior High School	Elementary	1-Room
1953-54	10	6	78	42	3	0	19	14
1954-55	10	6	78	43	3	0	18	15
1955-56	10	6	81	40	3	0	19	14
1956-57	10	6	78	38	3	0	18	15
1957-58	10	6	77	36	3	0	18	14
1958-59	10	6	75	35	2	0	16	15
1959-60	10	6	74	30	2	0	17	10
1960-61	9	6	70	16	2	0	16	9
1961-62	9	5	65	11	2	0	15	7
1962-63	9	5	63	5	1	0	14	4
1963-64	9	5	60	3	1	0	13	3
1964-65	9	5	57	2	1	0	8	2
1965-66	8	6	51	0	1	0	4	0
1966-67	8	7	50	0	1	0	4	0
1967-68	8	8	45	0	0	0	1	0
1968-69	7	8	43	0	0	0	1	0
1969-70	7	8	42	0	0	0	1	0
1970-71	9	8	40	0	0	0	1	0

Note: Statistics for the years 1972-77 are the same as those listed for the years 1970-71.

Table 2
Student Enrollment

	American Indian	Black	Asian American	Spanish Surname	All Others	Total
Fall 1968	19	2,187 (12.2%)	13	13	15,570 (87.4%)	17,802
1970	12	2,107 (12.1%)	8	14	15,154 (87.6%)	17,295
1972	17	1,980 (11.3%)	11	14	15,403 (88.3%)	17,425
1974	14	1,831 (10.5%)	18	10	15,560 (89.2%)	17,433
1975	3	1,735 (10.0%)	25	18	15,557 (89.7%)	17,338

Table 3
Faculty Composition, 1968-72

	American Indian	Black	Asian American	Spanish Surname	All Others	Total
Fall 1968	0	80 (9.9%)	0	0	724 (90.1%)	804
1970	0	79 (9.7%)	0	0	740 (90.3%)	819
1972	0	73 (8.6%)	0	1	769 (91.2%)	843

Note: Commission requests to school officials for updated statistics have gone unanswered.

II. HISTORY OF SCHOOL DESEGREGATION

School desegregation in Raleigh County began shortly after the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education. On December 21, 1955, in the case of Gladys Taylor v. Board of Education of Raleigh County, plaintiffs charged that segregation on the basis of race was being practiced in the Raleigh County school system. Five days before the hearing, on December 16, 1955, the school board adopted the following resolution:

Be it resolved unanimously by the Board of Education of the County of Raleigh, upon the advice of counsel that discrimination on account of race in the public schools of Raleigh County be and it is hereby abolished, and the Superintendent of Schools is hereby authorized and directed to adopt and put into effect a practical plan of desegregation at such time as the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of West Virginia, may direct.

On January 10, 1956, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia found sections of the West Virginia Constitution requiring public school segregation unconstitutional.

In ordering that the West Virginia public schools be desegregated, the court made clear its disapproval of discrimination in the schools, but also evinced a reluctance to become very deeply involved in school administrative matters. The court mandated the immediate institution of an open enrollment policy on a first-come, first-served, space-available basis. But for the long run, the court saw:

...no obstacle whatsoever to the complete freedom of pupils to be admitted to schools

next fall on an indiscriminate basis just by the establishment of attendance areas and of permitting pupils from those areas to attend the schools that are convenient to those areas.

Although no injunction was ordered, the court did say it would retain jurisdiction in the proceeding until its recommendations were fully implemented.

The case was held in abeyance by the court until November 6, 1961, when counsel for the plaintiffs asked the court to reopen the case to consider the failure of the board to desegregate the county public schools pursuant to the January 10, 1956, request, and to consider the conduct of the board in gerrymandering school zones and issuing orders designed to maintain segregation.

In October 1963 the plaintiffs presented evidence in support of these allegations. On November 26, the court ordered the board to submit its current plan of pupil assignment and attendance areas supported by intelligible maps.

The board filed its maps on January 6, 1964. The plaintiffs complained that the maps were not responsive to the court's order. The court then directed the board to file intelligible maps of attendance areas for each school together with descriptions of the attendance areas by metes and bounds, and a statement of the options, if any, offered to the students of any such attendance area.

The board on August 25, 1964, filed a volume containing 89 maps, a description of each area, and a statement regarding the options offered students of any attendance area. The board's policy combined a basic arrangement of neighborhood schools with several procedures through which pupils, with the approval of the superintendent's office, could attend schools in other attendance areas. The parents of the transferring pupils were expected to provide transportation for their children.

Upon consideration of the maps as well as the statement of policy, the court ruled on September 8,

1964, that both were acceptable under the principles set forth in Brown and were in accord with the various decisions of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit developing the principles of Brown. The court therefore ruled that there was no affirmative constitutional duty upon the board to change school attendance areas if they were innocently and reasonably drawn. However, the court retained jurisdiction to ensure that the approved plan would be implemented and continued.

In the summer of 1965, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (DHEW) began corresponding with the Raleigh County Board of Education regarding desegregation of its public schools. According to the superintendent at that time, the board for the previous 10 years and continuing since the 1964 court order had consistently and vigorously followed the policy of complete desegregation to the extent that every black pupil could attend the school of his or her choice, with preference for the one located within the immediate attendance area. But the student also had the right to transfer to any other school in the district. There was no compulsory segregation and both races had the right and privilege of attending the school of their choice. The superintendent also reported that his office and the school board encouraged this desegregation of the races, extending it also to include the transportation of pupils by buses. White and black pupils rode the same buses together for the first time.

DHEW was also interested in desegregation accomplishments over and beyond the court order of September 8, 1964. This was expressed in a question to the Raleigh County Board of Education, which the superintendent answered as follows:

The main things which the board has accomplished over and beyond the order of the district court have been the large number of consolidations and the distribution of teachers without regard to race, neither of which was mandatory under the court order. There have been six schools consolidated since the order of September 8, 1964. The

other things are in the fields of teacher distribution and pupil transportation in which segregation has been entirely abolished and the district wide policy of unrestricted transfer of pupils from one attendance area to another. The matter also of record keeping to eliminate all distinction as to race has gone beyond the court order. The Board is not interested in complying only with the mandatory provisions of the court order, but intends to and is continuing to go beyond that in every effort to eliminate all traces of discrimination.'

The final push toward complete desegregation in Raleigh County public schools began on February 16, 1973, in U.S. district court with the case of Adams v. Richardson. The court then ordered DHEW to communicate with a number of local school districts within 60 days from the date of the order. One district was Raleigh County, which DHEW requested to rebut or explain evidence of a substantial racial disproportion in one or more of the district's schools. (The court had defined a racially disproportionate school as one in which a "20% disproportion exists between the percentage of local minority pupils in the schools and the percentage in the entire school district.")

In response to the court order, the Director of the Office for Civil Rights, DHEW, shared with Raleigh County copies of the Adams and the Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg decisions and requested relevant data, including demographic information and a map of the district.

Up to this point, the superintendent was not aware of the effect these court decisions would have on Raleigh County. In a letter of May 21, 1973, he supplied all the information HEW had requested. The board, however, felt the district to be in compliance with existing law and noted in its letter the examination and subsequent approval of county policy by the court in Gladys Taylor v. Board of Education of Raleigh County, as well as the continuing jurisdiction of the court in the case. The board asserted that, "The attendance boundaries established by the Court have been continuously followed."

DHEW officials from Region III visited Raleigh County schools on June 7, 1973, at which time they asked that the board of education submit a plan for desegregating two schools which were categorized as "disproportionate schools."

On June 29, the board submitted its plan, which called for desegregating all-black Piney Oaks and all-white Maxwell Hill. Using the percentage of minority pupils in the schools within the city of Beckley, the board proposed a plan to desegregate these two schools by building extra classrooms, rezoning attendance areas (easily accomplished since all attendance areas involved border each other), utilizing one part of a formerly all-black school as a kindergarten and the other part as a school for accelerated pupils, and transferring teaching staff into the positions created by the transfer of pupils. These steps would effect full desegregation of five schools and produce minority student bodies well within the 20 percent deviation defined by HEW.

III. COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TOWARD DESEGREGATION

Although the atmosphere in which desegregation took place seemed serene, a closer look at the attitudes of white parents indicates that they were generally opposed to desegregation. They believed that blacks were getting the same education as whites before the change. A small number of white parents, who did not want the students to mix racially, formed car pools rather than let their children ride the bus. White parents were also concerned about the location of the schools their children would be attending. However, the majority of the white community accepted the plan, and while it played no active role in support of desegregation, neither did it organize to oppose it.

The attitudes of minority parents were just the opposite. They were generally in favor of the plan providing that it ensured quality education, with busing if necessary. They did not agree with white parents about the kind of education received at the black schools. They felt desegregation was needed for minorities to receive an equal education. They, too, did not actively support or oppose desegregation through organized activities.

Both white and minority students were neutral about desegregation prior to its implementation. Students felt it was something that had to be done, so the best thing to do was to make it work. Although some students were apprehensive about attending desegregated schools, students in general did nothing to hinder the implementation of the plan. Most students believed it would help prepare them to live and work with those of other races.

The Teachers Association as a group was very favorable toward desegregation, although some black teachers were apprehensive about desegregation. One black teacher who had experienced the implementation of

a desegregation plan in another county stated that the "plan [and] policy [were] the same: black high schools closed, the remainder became junior highs, one-way busing, and loss of black administrators." White teachers were generally in favor of desegregation. Their main concerns were school building assignments and the overcrowding of classrooms. Teachers did not play an active part in support of or in opposition to desegregation.

Business leaders stayed in the background and generally took no stand on desegregation. They actually avoided the whole issue even though they reportedly had no problems with it. Since the two previous efforts had been successfully handled by the superintendent, they did not think any problems would arise during the 1973 effort.

The mayor of Beckley reported that politicians and the media were neutral. He felt that desegregation would not have occurred without court direction. But desegregation had been tolerated, he said, because it is the law. Neither politicians nor media are reported to have played a major role in support or opposition to desegregation.

The religious leaders of the county favored school desegregation. Their main concern was that there would be violence. They appealed to their congregations for peaceful behavior during desegregation.

The gradual process of desegregation in Raleigh County over a period of more than 12 years contributed to the ability of the community to accept and adjust to the changes that desegregation brought to the schools. Although there was no active leadership in either the white or the black community in support of or against desegregation, the superintendent provided firm and educationally sound leadership in making desegregation work.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTS OF DESEGREGATION

The superintendent had sole responsibility for preparing and implementing each phase of the desegregation plan. In each phase, the superintendent's decisions were firm and his leadership clear. He received support from the board of education each step of the way, and strong supportive assistance from the assistant superintendent and from the administrators at the affected schools.

Communication of all changes resulting from desegregation with each affected individual and group was a key factor in achieving smooth and effective school desegregation. Prior to the implementation of each phase, the superintendent held meetings to discuss the effects of proposed changes with principals, white and minority parents, the media, and other groups interested in the effects of desegregation.

In addition to the meetings, an information center with telephone service was established at the board of education building to answer questions from parents and other citizens regarding the changes being made for desegregation and their effect upon individuals and communities.

Although desegregation was gradual, it brought with it inevitable changes--some subtle, some pronounced--in the Raleigh County schools.

Transportation

Students have always been bused in Raleigh County; one student said that "busing is natural." However, desegregation has increased student transportation significantly. Before 1964 about 70 percent of the students were bused; in 1970 the figure was 80 percent.

During school year 1975-76, 90 percent of the students were bused. The budget expenditure for pupil transportation remained essentially stable. The cost increased less than 2 percent after implementation of the desegregation plan. One year prior to desegregation, 5.75 percent of the school district's total budget was spent for transportation. During the first and second years of desegregation, 6.15 percent and 6.17 percent of the budget, respectively, were spent on transportation.²

The average length of the bus ride has remained about the same--15 minutes. The buses are typically desegregated because blacks and whites live together in the small rural towns that the buses serve. However, minority students are more likely to be bused than are whites.

The principal of Woodrow Wilson High School developed a scheme to use the busing experience as an integral part of the students' school lives. Representatives for student council are elected by riders on each bus from among themselves. This replaces the homeroom representation and effects greater participation for all students. The bus is also used as a forum in which to discuss school issues. Their use in this way increases interaction between black and white students.

Disruption.

There was no violence or disruption of schools during and following the implementation of each phase of desegregation. Desegregation took place very smoothly. While the chief of police indicated that some problems occurred at Woodrow Wilson High School in the 1964 implementation, he reported that they were handled by the faculty and staff of the schools themselves.

Quality of Education

Some parents and administrators say the overall educational quality has remained the same because black schools before desegregation provided the same education as white schools. Some citizens, including the chief of police, claim that Stratton High School,

all black before desegregation, was the best high school in the county, academically and athletically. Pupil achievement and teacher performance were not measured, however, and the system provides no means of measuring these two factors.

Curriculum and Teaching

The effect on the curriculum was minimal. The multicultural materials used were a result of the State's textbook adoption procedure rather than part of a desegregation plan.

Teaching methods were affected only because desegregation led to smaller classrooms that allowed teachers to meet the individual student's needs more often. Teachers were provided no specific training for the desegregation process. The training they received was in the form of faculty meetings where they were briefed on their assignments to schools.

Faculty

Faculty were generally affected in the same way as students. Whenever schools were closed and new ones built, the faculty were transferred to the school their students would attend. For example, when Woodrow Wilson and Stratton High Schools were closed and the new Woodrow Wilson was opened, the faculty of both schools were transferred to the new school. In the case of the Piney Oaks closing, the entire teaching staff was transferred to those schools their students would be attending.

Table 3 indicates that there has been a steady decrease in black faculty. Although the figures for black faculty do not indicate new hiring by the county, one black administrator mentioned that the board has hired additional minority faculty but not in sufficient numbers to offset the number retiring or leaving the district.

Facilities

Significant changes have occurred in the school facilities throughout the county because of desegregation. Prior to desegregation some all-black

facilities were clearly inferior to all-white schools. Because of the needs created by desegregation, however, renovation of older facilities and construction of additions and new buildings have combined with school pairings and closings to bring all facilities to a higher standard of quality for effective education.

Race Relations

As each step toward full desegregation was taken, some degree of improved race relations was achieved within the educational system. Administrators, teachers, and students all support this observation. Relations between students on the one hand and faculty and administrators on the other have improved as well. Some principals have taken careful steps to assure desegregation of all classrooms, student activities, and athletic teams. Desegregated buses, classes, and activities have made it possible for students to have long-term contacts, thus getting to know one another better.

One administrator has said, however, that it may take 4 or 5 more years to develop a completely smooth operation. Some interracial hostility continues to be evident, related closely to fear of persons of another race. Many in the schools and community consider the naming of the all-new high school (which brought students together from an all-black and an all-white school) with the name, colors, mascot, and team names of the white school and no symbols from the black school a serious mistake. White students are unhappy that they are excluded from the Miss Afro contest, for which only black students are eligible, since this is the only racially exclusive activity in the school.

V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The first conclusion stated by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in its report Fulfilling the Letter and the Spirit is that desegregation of the Nation's public schools is a constitutional imperative. Raleigh County as a community has faithfully strived to comply with the law and to fulfill the constitutional mandate to provide equal educational opportunity for all its students.

The Raleigh County public school system, through several phases implemented over a period of more than 12 years, has effectively desegregated its student bodies in all schools. The leadership on the part of each of the superintendents involved was the key to making the changes peaceful. Other school personnel and the board of education provided much-needed support to the superintendent. The appeals of the religious leaders to their constituents for peaceful desegregation contributed to the smooth implementation of the changes. The willingness of the entire community to do what was necessary to comply with the law was an important and little-noticed factor in desegregating the Raleigh County schools.

However, provisions to assure a desegregated faculty appear to be lacking. The number of black faculty has decreased significantly during the years desegregation has taken place. The addition of white faculty during the same time indicates that there has been an opportunity to recruit black teachers, but that opportunity has been missed so far by the school system. Moreover, there has been no serious attempt to provide teachers with training specifically designed to assist them in dealing with a desegregated student body.

It is necessary to conclude, therefore, that, while the Raleigh County public schools have

desegregated their student bodies, they have so far failed to pay sufficient attention to the highly important area of faculty and faculty impact upon students. Fully equal educational opportunity requires more than mixing the students of a school system by race. Students need teachers, administrators, and other adult leaders in the school who represent their races and ethnic groups. Furthermore, students need teachers who are trained and sensitive to the needs of a multiracial, multicultural student body. To complete its desegregation and to ensure its continued success, as well as to increase the educational opportunity now being provided its students, the Raleigh County schools should take affirmative steps to recruit and promote minority faculty and staff in the schools. The Raleigh County schools should also provide training for all personnel in the system--teaching, administrative, and service alike--by which they can become sensitive and effective in providing educational services to the students of the county.

As the Commission on Civil Rights made clear in its report, desegregation works. The Raleigh County public schools have demonstrated this to be true. How long this will continue to be true, and the degree of long-range success of desegregation in Raleigh County, depend now upon the school system's willingness to deal constructively and effectively with the questions raised about faculty and staff in this report. There is good reason to believe that the Raleigh County schools will fulfill the needs with respect to faculty, and thus increase the benefits for the whole county yielded by its public schools.

NOTES

1. Sherman C. Trail, secretary, Raleigh County Board of Education, and superintendent, Raleigh County Schools, letter to George Becker, Office of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, July 13, 1965.

2. Data provided by William Baker, superintendent, Raleigh County Schools, staff interview, Raleigh County, W. Va., Feb. 25, 1976.

• U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1977 729 217/562